



News release

Connecting central London to the north Kent coast as new stretch of the England Coast Path is officially open

- **The Grain to Woolwich stretch connects the sea and the Thames Estuary to central London for the first time.**
- **The nearly 50-mile route forms a continuous walking trail on the south bank of the Thames to the coast at Grain in Kent.**
- **The route links with the existing Thames Path at Woolwich to create a continuous 'source to sea' National Trail along the length of the River Thames.**

The new year brings a new trail for London and Kent residents and visitors to enjoy, to connect with nature and for health and wellbeing opportunities.

An incredibly varied 47.12-mile (75.85km) trail from the north Kent coast, along the wild reaches of the Thames Estuary which supports a wealth of wildlife, and beside the dynamic working tidal Thames in London, has been opened by Natural England today.

Marian Spain, Natural England Chief Executive said:

"The 2,700-mile-long England Coast Path will be the longest coastal walking route in the world as well as England's newest National Trail. It follows the whole coast, passing through some of our finest coast and countryside as well as iconic seaside towns and places of marine industry, past and present.

"At a time when the benefits of connecting with nature are clearer than ever, it's fabulous that we are opening up this 47 mile-long section of footpath from the capital to the Kent coast. Easily walkable in all weathers and readily accessible by public transport, it is a wonderful new recreational resource for the hundreds of thousands of people who live nearby, as well as a tourist attraction for those who will come from around the world to walk the whole Path."

This new trail covers a wealth of unique environments. As you set off from Grain on the Hoo Peninsula, you can enjoy views across to Sheerness on the Isle of Sheppey, to Southend-on-Sea, and the confluence of the Medway and Thames.

Surprisingly so close to such an urban area are some of the remotest grazing marshes in the south east. Between Allhallows and Cliffe in Kent, you can walk more than 12 miles (nearly 20km) without passing another coastal village or car park. There are some gorgeous little pocket beaches and extensive mudflats full of wintering wading birds. Along the river, you may also see the occasional grey seal hauled up on one of the many small beaches.

In the Thames Estuary, the largest in England, the creeks, extensive mudflats, saltmarsh and grazing marshes support a wealth of wildlife of national and international importance. During the winter months, you'll see flocks of waterbirds such as avocet, knot and dunlin and the nature reserve at Cliffe Pools in Kent is a popular spot for bird watching.

The Thames Estuary also has a long and rich military and industrial history. You can see forts such as Shornemead, near Gravesend, which were installed to protect London in the 1860s. You pass under the largest pylon in the UK and can look up at the impressive Queen Elizabeth II Bridge, which is the busiest estuarial crossing in Europe.

A new section of the path will also take visitors through the recently designated Site of Special Scientific Interest at Swanscombe Peninsula, where an industrial history has resulted in habitats that provide ideal conditions for a unique variety of wildlife.

As you walk beside the Thames, the busiest working port in the UK, the boat traffic provides a fascinating view into this dynamic working river. There are many independently run wharves handling goods arriving by large maritime vessels.

As you arrive in Woolwich, with great views of London's skyline, the England Coast Path meets the existing Thames Path National Trail. You pass the impressive Thames Barrier, which protects London from flooding, and can walk along the Thames to its source in the Cotswolds. This new stretch of the England Coast Path completes a 'source to sea' walking route along the country's most famous river.

Lord Benyon, Minister for Rural Affairs and access to nature said:

"The England Coast Path is greatly improving access to our cherished coastlines and connecting people across the country with nature, in line with our 25 Year Environment Plan. Home to a diverse array of bird life at this time of year, this latest stretch links the salt marshes and mudflats of the Thames Estuary with the heart of London. I encourage people of all ages and abilities to venture outdoors and explore this fantastic new path for themselves."

Mike Hill, Kent County Council Cabinet Member for Community and Regulatory Services said:

"The opening of this section of the England Coast Path extends opportunities for local residents and visitors to enjoy the outdoors and to discover some hidden gems along the lower Thames and North Kent coast. This really is an extremely varied stretch of coastline rich in wildlife and with a long history of industry, trade and transport. The result is a walk full of contrast and interest that will help support the health and wellbeing of visitors and the local economy."

Cllr Phil Filmer, Medway Council's Portfolio Holder for Frontline Services, said:

"Medway is proud to have two National Trails in our area including the England Coast Path, which is the longest, continuous, coastal trail in the world. Medway is also home to the Thames Path extension from Greenwich to Grain, making this trail a 'Source to Sea' walking route. We are delighted to have been part of this historic project that gives people even more

opportunities to connect with nature and explore new pathways and views. As well as giving Medway residents access to new trails, we look forward to welcoming new visitors to Medway where they can enjoy 1,900 hectares of rich and varied greenspaces.”

Natural England has worked with a number of partners to develop this trail, especially the four Access Authorities – Kent County Council, Medway Council, London Borough of Bexley and Royal Borough of Greenwich, who have worked on this project from the start and will be taking on management of the path now that it is open.

ENDS

Notes to Editors

Defra Group press office: 0800 141 2743 / communications_se@environment-agency.gov.uk

You can find images, a map of the stretch and drone footage [here](#).

Grain to Woolwich is the 16th stretch of the England Coast Path to open.

The 47.12-mile (75.85km) route will become part of the [England Coast Path](#) – the 2,700 mile long distance walking route and England’s newest National Trail currently being developed around the entire English coast by Natural England.

This stretch ensures the continuity of the England Coast Path as it connects the Kent coast at Grain to the Essex coast via the Gravesend to Tilbury ferry.

Following the Thames Path National Trail and linking to this new stretch takes you on a journey of 232 miles (374km) from the river’s source in the Cotswolds to the centre of London, and then on to the Thames Estuary and the sea. This will be a unique journey from ‘source to sea’, along high-quality National Trails.

Natural England started working on the Grain to Woolwich stretch in April 2017 with a wide range of partners and landowners. Our proposals were submitted to government in June 2019 and approved in April 2020.

The stretch is easily accessed via public transport. There are numerous train stations along the route including Woolwich Arsenal, Erith, Slade Green, Greenhithe and Gravesend. Public buses connect the villages of Grain and Allhallows with Rochester and the Thames Clipper offers a daily service between Woolwich Royal Arsenal and central London.

Kent has 66 miles (106km) of England Coast Path already open to the public between Camber to Ramsgate. Kent County Council and Medway Council are currently preparing sections of the trail to open this year, including the trail between Whitstable and Swale rail station and around parts of the Medway Estuary.

The Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009 places a duty on the Secretary of State and Natural England to secure a long-distance walking trail around the open coast of England, together with public access rights to a wider area of land along the way for people to enjoy. Natural England is working on the entire coastal route. A map showing a timetable for the

work is here: www.gov.uk/government/publications/england-coast-path-overview-of-progress.

The England Coast Path will be our longest, newest and most challenging National Trail, passing through some of our finest countryside and coastal locations.

It will secure legal rights of public access for the first time to typical coastal land including foreshore, beaches, dunes and cliffs.

As well as new sections of trail, there are improvements to existing access along the coastline which:

- identify a clear and continuous way-marked walking route along this part of the coast, bringing some sections of the existing coastal footpath closer to the sea and linking some places together for the first time.
- allow the route to 'roll back' if the coastline erodes, shifts or slips, solving the long-standing difficulties of maintaining a continuous route along the coast.

For more information, visit: www.gov.uk/government/collections/england-coast-path-improving-public-access-to-the-coast.

For more information about the walking route, visit: www.nationaltrail.co.uk/.

For more information about the Thames Path visit: [Thames Path - National Trails](#) where you can also find more information about the Source to sea.

The [Countryside Code](#), updated this year, is the official guide on how to enjoy nature and treat both it, and the people who live and work there, with respect.

Find out more about this stretch of the England Coast Path and Natural England on our social media channels: <https://twitter.com/naturalengland> (@NaturalEngland), <https://twitter.com/NESussexandKent> (@NESussexandKent) www.instagram.com/naturalengland/, <https://www.facebook.com/naturalengland>.